

BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW APOLOGETICS – (BUDDHISM) - Lesson 10

(NOTE: For anyone interested, much of this handout was constructed from notes taken from a lecture given by Dr. Greg Bahnsen on Buddhism)

Buddhism is a religion of Immanent Moralism (meaning that its emphasis is upon *human experience*). The stress is upon one living a certain lifestyle. The thrust of “salvation” in Buddhism is on one being moral, rather than being mystical. It has its mystical elements, to be sure, but its emphasis is upon exercising a moral lifestyle.
(Confucianism and Taoism are also in this class of world religions.)

Siddhartha Guatama became the Buddha. He grew up in ancient India, within a Hindu environment, somewhere between the 5th and 4th centuries before Christ. At some point in his life, he was very moved by the suffering he saw in both life and death, and began a quest to seek an answer to the end of suffering. His journey resulted in him becoming the "Buddha," which means the “awakened” or the “enlightened one.”

Siddhartha claimed he saw of vision with 4 passing sights - an old man, a sick man, a dead man and a shaven monk. After this vision he started his mission to understand why there is suffering in this world. He tried joining a Hindu ascetic cult that practiced self-beating and he almost died because of his intense participation in the cult beatings.

At some point after this he became “enlightened” to the truth he referred to as the “middle way.” This meant there is a path to salvation between the two extremes of asceticism and pleasure. He claimed that Mara (the “evil one” in Hinduism) came to him under a fig tree one day and tempted him, but he overcame the temptation and was enlightened. By becoming enlightened he became the Buddha. After enlightenment he experienced rapture (ecstasy) for 49 days, and then set out to preach and share his experience with others.

Buddha’s teaching wasn’t conducted solely based on authority (like Hindu priests claimed to have) but on the basis of experience. He said one would only believe what he taught if they experienced what he had experienced. His religion would be supposedly devoid of ritual, speculation, and distractions like trying to ponder the mystical truth of “oneness” in Hinduism. The Buddha also wanted to avoid tradition, in that individuals would seek their own fresh religious experiences.

Buddhism denies the super-natural. Buddha said that the supernatural was only a shortcut, a form of speculation that should be avoided. Buddhism is also an atheistic religion – there is no belief in a personal god in Buddhism. Buddhists are “here and now” people, meaning they are people who emphasize the immanent, focused upon present personal experience.

Buddhism does not have a doctrine of Creation – it actually denies a doctrine of Creation as such.

Buddha held to the doctrine of karma (the impersonal cosmic law of retribution - the way you live your life will be visited upon you in the next life, so the way you live your life will determine the outcome of your life, as in Hinduism. Your karma is what makes you who you are and is what holds you together.

Buddha also taught the **doctrine of “Anattā.”** Anattā means "no soul". There is no spirit or soul in man. So the question is, what is it that gets re-incarnated in man? According to Buddha, the answer is like that of two candles that share the same flame. The flame is passed to the next candle, and the flame is your karma - your karma is the flame, it is your karma that is passed onto the aardvark or the next person or whatever. So here we see that there is "no personal continuity" in Buddhism.

Although Buddhism is supposed to eschew ritual the poor have tended to create them and also include images of the Buddha in them. In both Buddhism and Hinduism the religion practiced by the masses almost always tends to give itself over to idolatry. (We see this sort of behavior displayed throughout history, recorded in the Bible, in one false religion after another, by the worship of pagan deities.)

SALVATION IN BUDDHISM

Buddhism is a religion of intense self-effort. One must completely work out his own salvation, which happens when one breaks away from Samsara, or the “wheel of life”, where one is re-incarnated over and over again. When this happens, one will experience “Nirvana,” which is the end of rebirth upon the wheel of life, and the end of all suffering.

The doctrine of Nirvana in Buddhism amounts to an ethical reality where future re-birth is not something to worry about. One has arrived to a place where they no longer have any cravings, and one has been released from suffering and karma, and one does not have to worry about their candle flame being passed on.

Buddhism challenged the prevailing Hindu caste system - it was egalitarian in that one could avoid having to move up into a higher caste to get off the wheel of re-incarnation. Thus, the peasant as well as the nobleman could obtain nirvana.

Buddhism tries to teach people the cause and effect relationship that brings about suffering. The main problem, according to Buddhism, is answering, *“What is suffering and how does one solve the problem of suffering?”* According to Buddhism man's desires bring about suffering. It attempts to solve the problem of suffering in a way that is empirical, pragmatic and practical.

How so?

Buddhism teaches that there are **4 Noble Truths**: 1) Life is suffering (bad things happen). 2) The cause of suffering is the desire for pleasure, or being individualistic. We want to acquire things and are selfish. 3) Suffering will cease when desires cease. We should think of ourselves in terms of a “universal all” - get rid of our individualism and personal desires. 4) The cessation of desire comes with “perfect detachment.”

How is “perfect detachment” achieved? Through the **Eightfold Path**: 1) Right Views (the 4 noble truths) 2) Right Desires (freedom from lust, ill will and cruelty) 3) Right Speech (Be truthful and do not talk in a vain way). 4) Right Conduct (Be charitable and do not kill living things) 5) Be Pure (You need a right livelihood and you must promote life in what you do.) 6) Right Effort (Stressing the will to overcome evil.) 7) Right Awareness (We must think of our bodies as loathsome. Sin is not our problem, ignorance is.) 8) Right Meditation (Do the Raja Yoga with the mantra.)

Now, the Eightfold path has **Ten Fetters** that get in the way:

1) Belief of Real Self a.k.a. the Delusion of Self, 2) Confidence in Rituals (that purification comes from rituals), 3) Unkindness or Anger, 4) Spiritual Pride or Self righteousness, 5) Ignorance 6) Doubt (of anything Buddha said), 7) Sensuality (passions arising from the senses), 8) Desire for life in the world of form (material existence), 9) Desire for life in a formless world (immaterial existence), 10) Inability to Concentrate the Mind (restlessness)

A Short Critique of Buddhism in all of its forms:

Paul said that people who are in the snare of the devil "oppose themselves." (2 Timothy 2:25) Buddhism is considered to be a noble religion in that its civic goals and ethics would be desirable. It is a morally respectable religion in its stated goals but it is intellectually barren. It makes no sense whatsoever.

With any religion so structured, one should ask, Who Says? Guatama had an experience out in the forest. So what? How do we know that this is a true religious insight into the world? What is the difference between what Guatama says about these things or what anyone else says? Upon what authority are these things based? Buddhism is based upon THE BUDDHA'S AUTHORITY. So one question is, who made him the authority? The Buddha made himself the authority! This is just another example of how every worldview is based upon Self-Authority - they are all Self-Attesting. The ultimate authority must authorize itself or else it is not the "ultimate" authority.

1) Buddha said seek what is good for yourself by denying yourself - a contradiction. On the one hand we are told that we must find salvation on our own, by being individualistic, but on the other hand, being individualistic causes suffering. So here, at

its most fundamental level the source of its salvation turns out to be the source of what we must be saved from.

- 2) When asked about Nirvana Buddha said, "*It is indescribable, unexplainable, inconceivable, and unutterable.*" Nirvana or salvation in Buddhism cannot be described. And so we must ask, "*How can we then have a conversation about something we can't conceive, speak about, explain or describe?*" If the flash of insight into this supposed truth comes through meditation, but is ultimately incommunicable, then how or why should we follow someone who only says that he has "been there" to experience this? How do we know that Buddha was not a con man? Essentially the Buddha was saying, "*Trust me, it's there, things are really like this.*" Rational people do not just blindly trust. Are we going to give up our rationality to take his words by faith?
- 3) The doctrine of re-incarnation doesn't include an individual soul. You lose the "me" in the "re" of re-incarnation in Buddhism. If there is no soul, or real me then what is re-incarnated. Furthermore, if Buddhism is a moralistic religion, and we're going to get "bad" karma by not following the eightfold path and this karma is then passed on to the next candle flame then why wouldn't one just say, "*Hey, so much the worse for the next flame.*" It seems as if the moral incentive is stripped away within its own doctrines. Also, how would Buddhist answer, "*How does an aardvark advance up the cycle of life?*" Another question is "*How is karmic moral code re-established by the egalitarian approach to the Caste system taught by Buddha?*"
- 4) Suffering in Buddhism is basically the experience of those things that are unpleasant. But why is this bad? If sin isn't the problem, but evil is, then what exactly is evil, where did it come from, and how did evil enter the world? How can it be defined in a way that is neither arbitrary nor inconsistent within a Buddhist view of the universe? And why exactly is the body itself "bad?" Are we to hate our bodies?
- 5) Because Buddhism denies the doctrine of Creation it cannot deal with the problem of "infinite regression." How is it that everything is seen to have a cause but there is no first cause?
- 7) Even though Buddha taught no one should believe in a god or gods he told stories in Hindu thought forms using "god-talk", such as when "Mara" the evil one appeared to him. Why did he do this? Why didn't the so-called appearance of this spiritual being bother the Buddha? If it wasn't a spiritual being what was it? (In lower class Buddhism there is a belief in personal deities.)
- 8) In some forms of Buddhism there is petitionary prayer. But this prayer is supposedly not made to a god who is listening because there is no "god." These petitionary prayers are supposedly made to other people - for such things as to be compassionate and to be shown the way out of suffering. But how do other people hear these prayers? How are these prayers supposedly answered? We are not told.